

Good evening Senators, members of the Committee my name is Sounthaly Thammavong and I am a board member of The Asian Pacific American Coalition of Connecticut. APAC is a group of individuals who advocate for basic rights on behalf of Connecticut's Asian Pacific Americans. I am also a Case Manager for Asian Family Services.

I would like to thank you in the support in the passage of Establishing an Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission. I am here to give my personal plea in order to show that there is a dire need for an adequately funded Commission in our communities.

As part of a lost generation, born to immigrant parents while brought up in the mainstream culture, we have lost our identities in trying to establish ourselves and our new communities. I am hoping what I say can bridge the ethnic diversity that our communities face have while naming the inequalities we endure across the spectrum.

It wasn't until I was in college that I realized due to language barriers that my father may still be alive today. I'll never know if he understood the severity of his condition or understood what medicines he was supposed to take and why. Ethically one should never rely on relatives, especially their own children, to translate complicated medical terminology.

Working in the only Mental Health Outpatient Clinic geared for South East Asian Immigrants and Refugees, in Connecticut I don't see the Model Minority. I see the trials that my own family went through. The population we serve is unrepresented and underserved. I value the work that my colleagues and I endeavor on the basis that we are meeting client needs so they can become self sufficient and productive members of society.

Because of the new Medicare spenddown, we now have clients who are choosing between their own mental health and being able to feed their children. We are in a financially difficult time and 'silent' communities like are own are slipping through the proverbial cracks even faster.

There is limited access to language lines for various Asian and South Asian dialects in the school systems as well as in the realm of healthcare. English as a Second Language classes are only for individuals literate in their mother tongues, which excludes a large number of Asian refugees now flooding into the state that either are preliterate or left under duress having no chance for education.

APAC would support new immigrants by advocating for healthcare initiatives that would help individuals help themselves. To have a healthy society we need healthy citizens which can only happen with education, access to healthcare and housing. APAC would serve as a liaison between the state and various communities to assess their needs.

Again I thank you for support and urge you to adequately fund the Commission, which is only a tiny part of the budget, in order to serve the concerns of this growing population.

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